

Questions & Answers Survey & Manage Record of Decision

Q) Why are the BLM and the Forest Service (agencies) removing the Survey and Manage Standards and Guidelines?

The decision will enable the agencies to better accomplish the dual goals of the Northwest Forest Plan which include healthy forest ecosystems and a sustainable supply of timber. Specifically, it best achieves the purposes set forth in the Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement which include continuing to provide for species diversity and conservation, reducing costs and effort, and restoring our ability to implement Northwest Forest Plan resource management goals and predicted timber outputs.

The provisions of the Northwest Forest Plan combined with the Agencies' Special Status Species Policies will continue to provide for diversity of plant and animal communities and conserve rare and little known species that may be at risk of becoming listed and under the Endangered Species Act.

Q) How will the Survey and Manage species be managed?

Survey and Manage species that qualify will be added to the agencies' Special Status Species Programs. These programs are based on national policies and seek to further the objectives of the Endangered Species Act by avoiding federal action that may contribute to future listings of species as threatened or endangered. They require coordination with state and other federal agencies to achieve conservation goals of species. The objectives of the Forest Service program also include compliance with National Forest Management Act regulations requiring diversity of plant and animal communities, and requiring habitat to be managed to maintain viable populations of existing native and desired nonnative vertebrate species in the planning area.

For 57 species that did not qualify for inclusion in the Special Status Species Programs in all or portions of their range, there is an increased risk that there could be insufficient habitat to support stable populations in all or a portion of their Northwest Forest Plan range. However, viewed in the context of the vast protections and conservation measures provided under the Northwest Forest Plan, the increased risk is small.

Q) How are Survey and Manage and Special Status Species Programs different?

Survey and Manage is a mitigation measure adopted in the Northwest Forest Plan Record of Decision in 1994. The objective of Survey and Manage is to conserve rare and little known species that were thought to be associated with Late-Successional and old-growth forests in the Northwest Forest Plan area.

The Special Status Species Programs are national policies adopted in the 1980s. They apply to all lands managed by the agencies and include any species that qualify, not just those associated with Late-Successional and old-growth forests. Specialists at field offices determine what species a project might effect, what information is needed to determine impact to a species, and document potential impacts and affirm that the action will not contribute to the need to list the species under the Endangered Species Act.

Q) How do species become Special Status Species?

The primary basis for adding species is information obtained from State Natural Heritage Programs and State Agencies responsible for wildlife and botanical resources. The decision to add a species is made by the Regional Forester or State Director and is also based on factors that include the agency's capability to significantly affect the conservation status of the species and whether there is sufficient information on habitat relationships and life history to evaluate potential effects.

Q) What are the agencies required to do for Special Status Species?

The Environmental Assessment or decision for a project must state that the project will not contribute to a listing as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act. Information about the species in the project area must be gathered and analyzed in an Environmental Assessment or Biological Evaluation. These sites are then managed for the benefit of the species if it is determined that management of the site will reduce the likelihood of the species being listed.

Q) Will the decision reduce protection for rare species?

The decision would somewhat reduce protection since not all of the species are fully included in the Special Status Species Programs or they were not included in all of their range. This is due to the fact that there are different criteria for including species in Survey and Manage versus Special Status Species Programs. As a result, analysis shows that there may be insufficient habitat to support stable populations in all or part of their range in the Northwest Forest Plan area for 57 species under the preferred alternative. This analysis is based on known information. Much of the information has been gathered through surveys conducted in the matrix area of the Northwest Forest Plan. However, only a small fraction of late-successional habitat has been surveyed and it is reasonable to assume that species habitat would occur in the same proportions in late-successional forest stands in the Reserves as occurs in the Matrix lands.

Q) Will the decision result in harvest of old growth forests?

The preferred alternative does not authorize any timber harvest. It is anticipated that the action would improve the agencies' ability to meet all the objectives of the Northwest Forest Plan.

The current probable sale quantity for the Northwest Forest Plan is 805 million board feet of timber per year. The agencies offered 116 million board feet 2001, 400 million board feet in 2002, and 473 million board feet in 2003. The decision to remove the Survey and Manage Mitigation Measures could contribute up to 70 million board feet of timber harvest per year. The agencies will still be harvesting less timber than the predictable and sustainable amount estimated in the Northwest Forest Plan.

Under the Northwest Forest Plan, approximately 86% of late-successional forest (6.9 million out of 8 million acres) is in reserves. The remaining late-successional forest (approximately 1.1 million acres) is located in the Matrix and Adaptive Management Area Land Use Allocations and is available for timber harvest. The preferred alternative does not change these allocations.

Q) Why weren't the language clarifications related to the Aquatic Conservation Strategy and changes to the Survey and Manage component of the Northwest Forest Plan addressed in the same environmental impact statement and Record of Decision?

Due to the specificity of the proposed change in the Aquatic Conservation Strategy related language, the Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service felt it would be more appropriate to analyze the proposals in separate environmental impact statements and to release two Records of Decisions.

Q) Why was the Record of Decision signed at the secretarial level?

The original 1994 Northwest Forest Plan and a 2001 supplement to the Plan were both signed at the secretarial level.

Q) When will the decision become effective?

The decision will be effective 30 days from the signing of the Record of Decision and is not subject to protest or administrative appeal.